

The Use of Instrumental Case with Predicate Nouns

predicate = the word or group of words which states a property, condition, etc. of the subject

predicate noun = a noun used in the sentence to describe etc. the subject

predication, predicating, predicative = saying something about the subject

Identifying the subject (the entity about which something is said/predicated), or
WHAT IS IN THE NOMINATIVE CASE

I. Pronouns and Names tend to be nominative in this construction:

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| (1) Ona jest moją najlepszą koleżanką. | | She is my best friend. |
| | not: | My best friend is she/her. |
| (2) Ty jesteś lekarzem. | | You are a doctor. |
| | not: | A doctor are you. |
| (3) Piotr jest dobrym studentem. | | Peter is a good student. |
| | not: | A good student is Peter. |

II. The key point is what describes what: does *a good student* describe *Peter*, or does *Peter* describe *a good student*? The expression which describes (predicates something of) another expression is the predicate noun and is in the INSTRUMENTAL case. The thing which is being described is the subject and is in the NOMINATIVE case.

III. In English, when the predicate noun is **definite**, the order of the predicate noun and subject can sometimes be switched:

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| (4) Warsaw is the capital of Poland. | or: | The capital of Poland is Warsaw. |
| (5) Mary is my best friend. | or: | My best friend is Mary. |

In Polish, only the word order can be switched, not the case (inst and nom):

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| (6) Warszawa jest stolicą Polski. | or | Stolicą Polski jest Warszawa. |
| (7) Maria jest moją najlepszą koleżanką. | or | Moją najlepszą koleżanką jest Maria. |

Note the connection between definiteness in English and the possibility of switching the subject and the predicate noun (see also (3)). Compare (4)-(5) and (8):

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| (8) Warsaw is a large Polish city. | not: | A large Polish city is Warsaw. |
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IV. A predicate noun (INSTRUMENTAL in Polish) usually denotes things or actions which are of a larger and more general character than the ones denoted by the subject (see also (2), (3), (8)):

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| (9) Karp jest rybą. | | A carp is a fish. |
| not: Ryba jest karpem. | not: | A fish is a carp. |